

Mid- Columbia Fire and Rescue to Focus Service and Responders on Local Emergencies

Date: June 18, 2024

Mid- Columbia Fire and Rescue is making some operational changes to enhance the ability for existing staffing to respond to 911 emergency calls locally:

Key Takeaways:

- MCFR is improving its operations to focus on local emergency calls.
- MCFR will discontinue conducting non-emergency interfacility patient transfers for Adventist Health Columbia Gorge, which divert a lot of responder hours and resources from the community.
- AHCG will have the opportunity to find a more suitable solution for interfacility patient transfers, either by contracting with another provider or doing it themselves.
- MCFR notified AHCG about this change in a meeting with hospital and Fire District leaders, and sent a letter right after on April 25, 2024.
- MCFR emphasized it will maintain its partnership with LifeFlight for critical care emergency patients.
- MCFR emphasized it will continue to doing interfacility transfers to provide sufficient time for AHCG located and secure a replacement service.
- Once AHCG finds a replacement for these services, a transition will take place to bring a stronger and more robust medical services network in the region by allowing MCFR to focus on Emergency Calls for Service while another provider and the Hospital focus on Hospital continuation of care.

Background and The Future:

For many years, Mid- Columbia Fire and Rescue (MCFR) and Adventist Health Columbia Gorge (AHCG) have been working together to provide quality health care services to the community. MCFR is the primary provider of pre-hospital emergency medical services in the region, responding to structure, wildland, and other fires, Emergency Medical 911 calls, Emergency transfers through a partnership with Life Flight, and non-emergency interfacility patient transfers. The Fire District operates an ambulance service and sends additional emergency responders to assist during critical calls.

Interfacility patient transfers are the transportation of patients from one health care facility to another, usually for a higher level of care, specific procedure, low staffing at the hospital, or imaging equipment issues at the local hospital. Currently, MCFR conducts most of the interfacility patient transfers for AHCG, which requires sending the local emergency responders to out of area locations such as Portland, Bend, and others. In 2023, interfacility transfers accounted for more than 2,000 responder hours outside of the region.

With the purpose of focusing resources on meeting the obligation of emergency responses MCFR has decided to make the operational decision to allow AHCG to begin to take responsibility for their own interfacility patient transfers. MCFR leadership met with AHCG administrative staff on April 25, 2024 to

inform them of our intention to make this transition, the goal of which is to provide efficient and timely Fire, Rescue, and EMS response to the people of Ambulance Service Area 2 and our Fire District. MCFR emphasized that it was our intention to continue doing interfacility transfers until AHCG was able to manage a smooth transition which minimizes any disruption to the patients and health care system.

AHCG now has the opportunity to contract with another governmental, private provider, or conduct interfacility transfers themselves, depending on their needs and preferences. The District has worked for more than 5 years to create an efficient and effective transfer operation, but the non-emergency needs of the hospital draw resources away from the emergency responsibilities of the Fire District. MCFR will continue to conduct interfacility transfers during this transition period to allow an appropriate amount of time for AHCG to secure its own solution, which is best for patient care. After the transition, The Fire District will maintain its existing agreement with LifeFlight to transport critical care patients with their crews and the Fire District Ambulance.

This decision will bring many benefits to the Hospital and the Fire District, and most importantly the community. MCFR will be able to focus on pre-hospital emergency medical services, without compromising the availability and response time of the local emergency crews. AHCG will have more local control and flexibility with their interfacility patient transfers and will be able to choose a provider which meets their standards and expectations. The community will benefit from having both MCFR and AHCG enhance their services and operations and provide better care and safety for the residents and visitors of the region.

MCFR and AHCG have a long-standing and positive relationship, and both are committed to working together to ensure a smooth and seamless transition. MCFR has offered its open assistance to AHCG to help them with any challenges or issues that may arise during this process and has been anticipating notification from ACHG to schedule a follow-up meeting to continue working through this transition. MCFR and AHCG will also continue to collaborate and communicate on other matters of mutual interest and concern, such as emergency preparedness, public education, and community outreach.

For more information, please contact: Chief Palmer or Assistant Chief Jensen at 541-296-9445.